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Arts

THE "SHREVALTY OF LYNDEN"

A TRAGEDY IN ONE ACT

—BY—

J. W KEATING.

St. Catharines, March 11th, 1889.

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TO

John McKeown, Esq

Crown Attorney for the

COUNTY OF LINCOLN,

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PERSONS REPRESENTED.

Frederick Dickson, *Newly appointed Sheriff of Lynden.*
Walter G. Tench, *Ex-acting, and Deputy Sheriff of Lynden.*
John McMahon, *County Crown Attorney for Linden.*
Donald Green, *A Constable for Lynden.*
Frank Dardanus, *The man who committed the murder.*
John Fisher, *The man who was murdered.*
Douglas Cameron, *A messenger.*

The Shrievalty of Lynden.

SCENE I.—*Sheriff's Office, Town of Arcona.*

Enter Walter G. Tench and Donald Green.

W. G. T. So now the Government of Oronto,
hath appointed
Frederick Dickson, Sheriff of this county:
And as acting sheriff will I now retire [in order,
For the new appointee: see thou that all things are
As doth become the office of a sheriff. (*to D. G.*)

D. G. Your honor, I have every thing in its place:
The rooms are swept, and in perfect order.
Sheriff Dickson me thinks, will be a civil gentleman
And to pleasure him, I will my best endeavors.
Though with your honor I've no fault to find,
And I could serve thee ever while I live.

W. G. T. I would the new sheriff did appear
And claim the position which to him belongs.
What ho! I do hear footsteps in the hall;
It is the new sheriff.

Enter Sheriff Dickson.

S. D. To assume the duties of mine office.
After months delay and impatient waiting,
The writ from the Oronto Government came,
Advising me of my appointment, to
The vacant shrievalty of Lynden.
So many were aspirants for the office,
Whose many claims could not be well o'erlooked,
Were laid before the provincial council;
When that august body did consider well,
And weigh closely each aspirants claim,
An onerous duty and perplexing task
To give to each, acknowledgement and credit due
For their loyalty in their party's cause.
And when 'twas shewn that all behaved so well,
In conducting many political contests,
And their victories in many glorious fights,

To be seen emblazoned on their golden shields.
After long debate, the lords in council gave
Their decision, and appointed me:
Whether 'twas due to my unceasing toil,
In the many contests I have fought and won,
Or was it that my Adonislike form hath sped me,
Or other potent reasons did bear me through.
Well here am I clothed with a sheriff's power,
To act in rigour, or in mercy bend.

Enter John McMahon.

J. McM. Oh! my sweet cousin, let me give thee [welcome,
As sheriff of this county, welcome here.
The government, could ne'er have appointed
So fit a person as thou to fill that office:
And whilst I give thee welcome, I do proffer
My services, as counsel in thy office duties.
For the intricacies of the law, may oft entangle
The most prudent man in the law unversed:
And leave thee with many losses on thy hands.
Most simple to me, is the knowledge of the law,
To acquire it commenced I in my youth,
And continued I its pursuit until the present.
Therefore with it, so filled am I with knowledge,
That beshrew me, I can hold no more.
Like unto the well riped acorn of the oak,
Whose kernal fills the area of its shell:
Or like the fresh lain egg, the shell of which

Is filled with its contents the full capacity:
Or like unto the emblematic maple,
Whose sap vessels are filled to o'erflowing,
And tapped by sylvan rustics in the ides of March,
Thus yielding its sweet and luscious syrup.
Therefore my friend, I am ever at thy service,
To guide, council and assist the in thine office. [aid

S. D. Sweet cousin, I thank thee for thy proffered
And will gladly seek thy counsel when in want.
But is there nothing, which I can offer thee,
In fair exchange for what thou'llt do for me?

J. McM. I would that you abate the nuisance,
Of loud talk and disturbing noises:
Too frequently indulged in, by a constable
Donald Green; who hath long found
Employment in this office, and doth disturb
The peace and quietness of these halls:
In coversation, in manner loud and piercing,
And grating harshly on the tympanum of mine ear:
Causing deep shock to my nervous system, and make
Me bristle all over, like the fretful porcupine.
Preventing mine entertainment of deep thought,
Thereby causing grave injustice, and much injury
Generally, to Her Majesty's liege and contented
Subjects: and disturb the quiet of this castle.
Some several years ago I did cause abate
Within these walls, a nuisance that had grown

To huge proportions in its fearful smell;
That generated in the dark vaults beneath
The floors we stand on, and thence ascended,
Filling this building with gross and frightful oders,
Until mine olfactories were so much assailed,
As to cause a heaving of the innerman.
In vain appealed I to those rustic reeves,
Who sate in council, having in their charge
The hygiene, within these spacious walls.
And not until after many years of toil,
In halls of justice, and with warlike tongue,
Did I abate the nuisance of those smells.

S. D. to D. G.

What sayest thou Donald to this mighty charge,
Against thy gifted but stentorian voice? [harsh,

D. G. So please your honor, I know my voice is
A fault, if it be a fault, was in my younger days
Acquired by me, in my country's service:
In many battles, admidst shouts, yells and carnage,
And loud reports of cannons, guns and mortars,
When strife ran high in the loud din of battle.
There it was, when my ears were deafened:
And where dispatches were not conveyed in whisper,
But the full uses of my lungs I learned,
Admidst deadly charges, and shouts of victory.

S. D. Donald Green, now hast thou well spoke,
And given satisfaction in thy good excuses.

Ex-acting sheriff, how hast Donald bore himself
Concerning the office duties confided to him ?

W. G. T.

Like unto a fiend incarnate when protecting,
Distress and seizure from all lawless hands :
And Cerberus, at Hades gates set watching,
Would be no equal match for Donald Green :
No Hercules could at his post subdue him,
Nor make him fear or quale while at his post.

S.D. Now my good friends, this lucid explanation
Full satisfies me, and so we now must part,
You unto your tasks and destinations,
And I to commune within myself my part.

Exeunt Omnes.

SCENE II.—*Sheriff's Private Office.*

Enter Sheriff Dickson.

S.D. Long have I waited for this welcome hour,
To stand here clothed with a sheriff's power;
Not until after long weary months delay,
Did the Crown Patent, for which I oft did pray,
Issue from the Royal ministers of state,
My appointment to this shrievalty : e'en late.
And now must I equip myself with gear,
That in court I may with dignity appear.
Let a court coat my Adonis form adorn,
That I no part of my dignity be shorn.
Then I a sword must wear to grace my side,

As warning to all, that they in peace abide.
Another thing, and of no small affair,
A cocked hat would become me well to wear,
When this official gear I'll have me girt about,
Me thinks I'll hear the people cheer and shout :
Lo! Here's the new sheriff they all will cry;
And thus they'll greet me as I pass them by.
Now my official duties I them must learn,
They'r of great moment, and of much concern :
The writs of seizure, of distress and rent,
And other executions will to me be sent.
To levy such 'gainst the afflicted poor will rend,
My gentle heart, to which my softer feelings tend.
And when evicted tenants thrown on the street,
Without the means, their lawful rent to meet ;
Will greatly blame me for the part I took,
Against them, and they'll show it by their look.
And thus whilst I my official power wield,
To them in sympathy, my tender heart must yield.
It is in courts of law where all suits begin,
Not only criminal, but civil suits therein.
Therefore the fault of litigation rests not with me,
But in the divers suiters, as I plainly see;
And in courts conducted, as justice may demand,
Where prisoners and suiters, upon their trials stand,
And where judgement or conviction may be had:
And where justice will prevail against the bad.

Thence from the courts of law to sheriff's are sent,
All writs of execution, and of extent.
Then they to distress and seizure must resort,
Or make return of nulla bona to the court.
When commitment in the sheriff's hand is placed
To take to durance vile, for a crime that's traced,
To some misguided man, whose base passion lead
Him from the path of virtue, and the dread
Of punishment by law for his misdeed,
Is banished to prison, with the utmost speed.
Oh ! The stern duties of a sheriff thus to part,
A man from wife and child, so near his heart.
And when the sheriff with handcuffs now appears,
And finds the prisoner's faithful wife in tears :
And yielding to her husband's close enbrace,
Whilst briny tears suffuse her saddened face.
At length they exchange their last lingering kiss,
As months may pass ere they repeat this bliss.
And now to prison, his victim the sheriff takes,
And him to the gloomy cell, the jailor rakes ;
Thus separated from his wife and friends,
Until the term of his inprisonment ends.
Then there are those, who murder do commit,
When on their victims, corner's inquest sit.
And after trial, condemned to execution,
The means for which, is a cruel institution.
Let me think on't for a moment if I can :

If a court of justice should condenm a man,
To death by hanging, for some dreadful crime,
Within my shrievalty at some future time:
And suppose it was a woman thus condemned,
Fancy the position in which I would be hemmed.
Or if in some rash moment a maiden young,
Should some foul murder do, and for which be hung:
And in any of these cases, if I could not get
Some man to hang them, I would sorely fret.
Woe is my soul should I to hangman turn,
For then in my heart, I would ever burn.
Keep still my soul, and thou my heart be firm:
I have it now, I'd make the guilty squirm.
Some men are tempted by the proffered gold,
And at all times willing to let themselves be sold.
So in the future I need not be distressed,
In this regard my mind shall be at rest.
Therefore I'll ne'er borrow trouble 'till the day,
When it shall come, then to meet it as I may.

Exit Sheriff Dickson.

SCENE III.—*Sheriff's Public Office.*

Enter Sheriff Dickson, John McMahon and Walter G. Tench.

S.D. So now I've had experience in mine office duties,
Which at first to my tender heart gave pain:
And causing me much remorse of conscience
And concernment, in regard to the apparent

Cruelty, consequent upon my official duties:
For oft in the dead of night my soul was harrassed
To such extent, that the god of somnes,
Though often sought, could grant me no relief.
And thus for months continued I in this purturbation,
And tossing on my pillow with oppressive thought:
Now have I become inured to the stern duties
Of a sheriff, and tender feelings somewhat seared;
And in my capacity official, with skill and courage,
Do I now perform the requirements of mine office.
County attorney McMahon, what thinkest thou
Of the knowledge I have gained, and progress made?

J. McM.

Thou hast done nobly well my friend and much
Capacity shewn, in thy acquirements of
The laws and usage pertaining to thine office.
Your princely bearing whilst in open court,
Hath not been by me unnoticed, nor hath
Thy courtly gear in vain sought admiration.
Clad as thou wert, in regulation coat,
And on thy head cocked hat with stately plume,
And at thy side a courtly sword didst wear,
Which made thee, the observed of all observers.
In appearance thou well hast made thy mark,
And of thy functions, thou hast discharged them well.
Proceed with caution, as thou didst well begin.
And "Fiat Justitia, ruat ceolum."

What sayest thou ma ter Tench ?

W. G. T. Quite right
Master McMahon, your words are wise and prudent,
As I know through long experience as acting sheriff;
Through which I did acquire, immense knowledge
Pertinent to the workings of this office.
And clear and free left I the shrievalty of Lynden,
To the new appointee, Master Sheriff Dickson.
Although whilst I had in charge this office,
No court coat my airylike form encased,
Nor no cocked hat and plume adorned my head,
No sword nor sabre at my side displayed;
And no other badge of power, or royal state
Didst wear, but simply an ordinary costume
Did grace my person whilst in official role.

SCENE IV.

Enter Donald Green.

D. G. to S. D.
Your honor, I have learned that a magistrate
Hath sent, to the county jail to wait his trial,
A man, Frank Dardanus, who a murder
Did commit, upon the person of one John Fisher.

S.D. Oh! Then is this harbinger of the coming on
Of my fate, which at a former time I did premise ?
The portending storm I fear, hath well nigh reach
Me, to envelope me in its dark and dismal folds:
So soon! Ah! yet so soon, must I thus be,

The instrument of a sudden cutting off,
Of a fellow creature from this temporal life,
His earthly strife, his sorrows and his joys as well.

J. McM.

Take not so gravely, this matter to thy heart,
The prisoner is but committed, to await
His trial, and his trial hath not yet begun.
Do thou therefore abide in peace thy soul,
Until thou hearest the sentence of the court
Pronounced upon the prisoner, as perchance
The evidence adduced against him, may
Not be sufficient to convict, and then
Him, the court and jury must acquit.
Then the part thou dreadest be not required
Of thee; and thus a respite for some time
Indefinite, be then vouchsafed to thee.

Exeunt Omnes.

SCENE V.

Enter Sheriff Dickson, John McMahon, Walter G. Tench and Donald Green.

S. D.

Oh! Now hast come to pass, that which I so long
Have dreaded. The trial over, and the prisoner
Hath been condemned, to execution on the gallows.
The empannelled jurors upon the trial, found
The prisoner guilty; such was their verdict.
And the Lord Chief Justice, presiding on the bench,

Did then pass sentence upon the prisoner,
That he be hanged for his awful crime.
I have not wasted time in advertising, for
A bold man as hangman, at the execution.
Large sums of gold have I therein offered :
But no response to my liberal offer
Have I received, therefore, I now do call
Upon my friends, to assist me in this execution.
Now Donald Green, thou hast long been in
The army, and well tried for bravery and nerve ;
Can'st thou then tackle, and hang the guilty man ?
Can I depend on you in this trying hour ?

D. G. Your honor, I am waxing old, and
My nerves are in condition shattered.
Oh ! when fought I in the British Army,
I was at that time young and strong, and had
The courage of a lion, and in those days
Could acquit myself to thy satisfaction.
Now, in my old age I would not shed the blood
Of any man, nor take his life for fear
His ghost might in the dead of night arise,
And frighten me, clean out of my senses.

S. D.

Now Master Tench, I've only thee to look to,
For assistance in this emergency and trying
Hour : cannot you perform this execution ?

W.G.T. Master Sheriff Dickson, I would that I
Knew how: The art of tying a rope
For that intent, hath been neglected
In my early education, and since which
Time, I have not made improvement.
But sir, if you would but adjust the knot,
And pull the cap, I think I could spring
The trap, and "shuffle off his mortal coil."

S. D. Oh! has it come to this, when I myself
Must turn hangman, and do this dreadful deed?
Oh! Why do they not invent some newer method
To put to death, these malefactors, in manner
Less repugnant to a tender hearted man?
For instance, a battery charged with electricity
Of such force and power, that when applied,
Would instantauneosly kill the victim.
And would not death in some milder form
Have as great an effect as hanging
To cause sufficient terror to deter
People, from commission of heinous crimes?

J. McM. No my friend, I see you are far astray
In your idea, concerning the dread of death
By those, who usually do commit great crimes.
Death by electricity in the manner named,
Would not be sufficient, to strike with terror,
Those who are inclined to commit such crimes.
For those who attempt to take their lives,

Most always do, the easiest method take
As death by drowning is but little more than
Sleep, and such would be in death by electricity.
Therefore, to assure the peace against great crimes,
The well tried style of hanging, is the only means.

S. D. Oh! That a writ of pardon or reprieve,
Would come to me, ere the sentance of the court
Be carried out to its full extent.
I dreamed but yestern night that a petition
Hath been sent, to the executive authorities
At Ottawa, shewing circumstances, by
Which Dardanus' crime is much mitigated:
And a possible chance for pardon or reprieve.
But in the meanwhile I must well prepare,
To carry into effect the law, to the bitter end.
Therefore, to-morrow at sunrise, at the jail we'll meet.
The cap, rope and scaffold, are now ready:
Also, I have ordered to be prepared, a most
Sumptuous breakfast, for the man condemned,
So that he may with strengthened nerves be blest,
To walk with firmness, to meet his coming doom.
Now let us part and seek our grateful couch,
And meet to-morrow, at the break of day.

Exeunt Omnes.

SCENE VI.—In rear of County Jail.

Enter Sheriff Dickson, Walter W. Tench, Donald Green and others.

S. D. Ascending the steps of the gallows,
Here I see all things ready for the execution :
The beam is firm, to which is tied the rope
Of regulation length, also here the trap
Upon which the prisoner stands, awaiting:
The time he bids farwell to all things earthly
And here the cord by which his hands are pinioned,
To prevent him struggling for his existence.
Yonder stands the gaping crowd, now watching
With levity and heartlessness, for the awful end
Of the man condemned, who will shortly stand
Upon this gallows, to answer to the law's decree,
As a dread example to all evil doers.
Now then will I for the prisoner call,
And get me through with this dreadful task:
As procrastination is the thief of time.
Ho! Master Jailor, send to me the prisoner.

(The prisoner is brought.)

Ah! Now Dardanus, hast thou come here to meet
Thy doom, in just punishment for thine offence,
The foul and awful murder of John Fisher,
Whom, with malice aforethought, thou didst slay,
By casting him headlong into a river,
From whence he never again appeared.
Hast thou yet partaken of the delicious viands,
Which, on yestern night, I did order for thee,
As will also, the bottle of Guiniss's stout,

In order to give thee strength to meet thy fate?

Dardanus

Your honor, I have eaten what thou gavest me,
And physically, have filled the inner man.
For the kindness in what thou hast done for me,
Respectfully, I tender thee my thanks.
But is there no reprieve for me or pardon ?
I would avert if possible, this doom.
For I am innocent, and did not commit
The dreadful crime, of which I have been charged.

S. D. Ask anything in reason, and I will grant
Thy last request, but to release you from
The penalty, which you have justly earned
I can not, as 'tis not for me to grant.
Therefore stand here and let me tie thy hands,
So thou canst not release thee from the rope.
Now then Donald Green, give me the cap,
There now it's on and well drawn down.
And now the rope, please hand to me, and then
The knot I'll tie, there now 'tis done.
Though a nuptial knot I would prefer to tie,
As in its consequence, there is far less danger.
Now master Tench, art thou at thy post ?

W.G.T. I am Master Sheriff, and ready for the cue.

S.D. When I give thee the words, once, twice, three times,
Do thou at the word *times*, spring the trap.

Now then hist! Master Tench, once, twice three--

Enter Douglas Cameron.

Hold! I have here a writ from the governor,
Granting pardon to one, Frank Dardanus.

Hands the writ to sheriff Dickson, who reads it.

S. D. "His Excellency, the Governor General,
To Frederick Dickson, Esquire, Sheriff of
The County of Lynden, Oronto, sends greeting.
Now know ye, that whereas one Frank Dardanus,
Having been charged before our court of assize,
Within your Shrievalty, with the murder of one
John Fisher, whom he cast into the deep river,
Of Niagara, whose surging waters rush on,
Until through lake and river they reach the ocean.
And for which crime Dardanus hath been tried,
Convicted, and sentenced to be hanged. And
Since which time it hath been to me presented,
That the said John Fisher was not then killed,
But by his own act did jump down the bank
Of the river, catching to crag and bramble,
As he went, until alighting in a crevice
Of the rock, and there secreted himself until
The storm had blown over, and now appears again
Alive, and without any injury to him.
Hence, the said Dardanus hath not been guilty,
Of the crime, for which he lately hath been condemned.
Now, therefore we command you, hang not Dardanus,

But let him go as free, as the birds of the air."

Dardanus

Your honor, now please take off these ropes and cap,
And give back to me my freedom, let me go.

(Releasing prisoner from cap and ropes :)

S. D.

Go thou Dardanus, thy shave hath been but close,
Another moment, and thou wast in eternity.
Ho! now my friends, we have been much relieved,
From taking the life of a fellow mortal.
Now return we at once unto my office,
That I this day's proceedings in my book record.

Exeunt Omnes.